

Homily 24 on Ephesians

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual warfare and the need for believers to be prepared with the armor of God, including truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 38:5, Proverbs 3:3, Matthew 5:6, Matthew 25:44, Romans 8:18, Ephesians 6:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Christian Armor"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the spiritual armor described in Ephesians 6:14-17, emphasizing the importance of being equipped with truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God to withstand the attacks of the evil one. He highlights the significance of faith as a shield that quenches all fiery darts of temptation and the necessity of prayer, supplication, and perseverance in the Spirit for all believers. Chrysostom urges the congregation to maintain incorruptible faith, love, and grace, seeking peace and unity in Christ, and to be vigilant in prayer and virtuous living to avoid the eternal corruption of sin.

Transcript

Ephesians 6:14-17

Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; withal taking up the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Having girded your loins, says he, with truth. What can be the meaning of this? I have stated in the preceding discourse, that he ought to be lightly accoutered, in order that there should be no impediment whatever to his running.

And having on, he continues, the breastplate of righteousness. As the breastplate is impenetrable, so also is righteousness, and by righteousness here he means a life of universal virtue. Such a life no one shall ever be able to overthrow; it is true, many wound him, but no one cuts through him, no, not the devil himself. It is as though one were to say, having righteous deeds fixed in the breast; of these it is that Christ says, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6 Thus is he firm and strong like a breastplate. Such a man will never be put out of temper.

And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. It is more uncertain in what sense this was said. What then is its meaning? They are noble greaves, doubtless, with which he invests us. Either then he means this, that we should be prepared for the gospel, and should make use of our feet for this, and should prepare and make ready its way before it; or if not this, at least that we ourselves should be prepared for our departure. The preparation, then, of the gospel of peace, is nothing else than a most virtuous life; according to what the Prophet says. You will prepare their heart, you will cause your ear to hear. Psalm 10:17 Of the gospel, he says, of peace, and with reason; for inasmuch as he had made mention of warfare and fighting, he shows us that this conflict with the evil spirits we must needs have: for the gospel is the gospel of peace; this war which we have against them, puts an end to another war, that, namely, which is between us and God; if we are at war with the devil, we are at peace with God. Fear not therefore, beloved; it is a gospel, that is, a word of good news; already is the victory won.

Withal taking up the shield of faith.

By faith in this place, he means, not knowledge, (for that he never would have ranged last,) but that gift by which miracles are wrought. And with reason does he term this 'faith' a shield; for as the shield is put before the whole body, as if it were a sort of rampart, just so is this faith; for all things yield to it.

Wherewith you shall be able, says he, to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one.

For this shield nothing shall be able to resist; for hearken to what Christ says to His disciples, If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove. Matthew 17:20 But how are we to have this faith? When we have rightly performed all those duties.

By the darts of the evil one, he means, both temptations, and vile desires; and fiery, he says, for such is the character of these desires. Yet if faith can command the evil spirits, much more can it also the passions of the soul.

And take the helmet, he continues, of salvation, that is, of your salvation. For he is casing them in armor.

And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. He either means the Spirit, or else, the spiritual sword: for by this all things are severed, by this all things are cleft asunder, by this we cut off even the serpent's head.

Ver. 18, 19, 20. With all prayer and supplication, says he, praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; and on my behalf that utterance may be given unto me, in opening my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

As the word of God has power to do all things, so also has he who has the spiritual gift. For the word of God, says he, is living, and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. Hebrews 4:12 Now mark the wisdom of this blessed Apostle. He has armed them with all security. What then is necessary after that? To call upon the King, that He may stretch forth His hand. With all prayer, and supplication, praying at all seasons in the Spirit; for it is possible to pray not in the Spirit, when one uses vain repetitions Matthew 6:7; and watching thereunto, he adds, that is, keeping sober; for such ought the armed warrior, he that stands at the King's side, to be; wakeful and temperate:-- in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; and on my behalf that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth. What do you say, blessed

Paul? Have you, then, need of your disciples? And well does he say, in opening my mouth. He did not then study what he used to say, but according to what Christ said, When they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what you shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what you shall speak Matthew 10:19: so truly did he do everything by faith, everything by grace. With boldness, he proceeds, to make known the mystery of the Gospel; that is, that I may answer for myself in its defense, as I ought. And are you bound in your chain, and still needest the aid of others? Yea, says he, for so was Peter also bound in his chain, and yet nevertheless was prayer made earnestly for him. Acts 12:5 For which I am an ambassador in chains, that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak; that is, that I may answer with confidence, with courage, with great prudence.

Ver. 21. But that you also may know my affairs, how I do, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things.

As soon as he had mentioned his chains, he leaves something for Tychicus also to relate to them of his own accord. For whatever topics there were of doctrine and of exhortation, all these he explained by his letter: but what were matters of bare recital, these he entrusted to the bearer of the letter. That ye may know my affairs, that is, may be informed of them. This manifests both the love which he entertained towards them, and their love towards him.

Ver. 22. Whom I have sent unto you, says he, for this very purpose, that you may know our state, and that he may comfort your hearts.

This language he employs, not without a purpose, but in consequence of what he had been saying previously; having girded your loins, having on the breastplate, etc., which are a token of a constant and unceasing advance; for hear what the Prophet says, Let it be unto him as the raiment wherewith he covers himself, and for the girdle wherewith he is girded continually Psalm 109:19; and the Prophet Isaiah again says, that God has put on righteousness as a breastplate Isaiah 59:17; by these expressions instructing us that these are things which we must have, not for a short time only, but continually, inasmuch as there is continual need of warfare. For it is said the righteous are bold as a lion. Proverbs 28:1 For he that is armed with such a breastplate, it cannot be that he should fear the array that is against him, but he will leap into the midst of the enemy. And again Isaiah says, How beautiful are the feet of him that brings good tidings. Isaiah 52:7 Who would not run, who would not serve in such a cause; to publish the good tidings of peace, peace between God and man, peace, where men have toiled not, but where God has wrought all?

But what is the preparation of the Gospel? Let us hearken to what John says, Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Matthew 3:3 But again there is need also of another preparation after baptism, so that we may do nothing unworthy of peace. And then, since the feet are usually a token of the way of life, hence he is constantly exhorting in this language, Look, therefore, carefully how ye walk. Ephesians 5:15 On this account, he would say, let us exhibit a practice and example worthy of the Gospel; that is, make our life and conduct pure. The good tidings of peace have been proclaimed to you, give to these good tidings a ready way; since if you again become enemies, there is no more preparation of peace. Be ready, be not backward to embrace this peace. As you were ready and disposed for peace and faith, so also continue. The shield is that which first receives the assaults of the adversary, and preserves the armor uninjured. So long then as faith be right and the life be right, the armor remains uninjured.

He discourses, however, much concerning faith, but most especially in writing to the Hebrews, as he does also concerning hope. Believe, says he, in the good things to come, and none of this armor shall be injured. In dangers, in toils, by holding out your hope and your faith to protect you, you will preserve your armor uninjured. He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him. Hebrews 11:6 Faith is a shield; but wherever there are quibbles, and reasonings, and scrutinizings, then is it no longer a shield, but it impedes us. Let this our faith be such as shall cover and screen the whole frame. Let it not then be scanty, so as to leave the feet or any other part exposed, but let the shield be commensurate with the whole body.

Fiery darts. For many doubtful reasonings there are, which set the soul, as it were, on fire, many difficulties, many perplexities, but all of them faith sets entirely at rest; many things does the devil dart in, to inflame our soul and bring us into uncertainty; as, for example, when some persons say, Is there then a resurrection? Is there a judgment? Is there a retribution? But is there faith? the apostle would say, you shall with it quench the darts of the devil. Has any base lust assaulted you? Hold before you your faith in the good things to come, and it will not even show itself, yea, it will perish. All the darts; not some quenched, and others not. Harken to what Paul says, For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to us-ward. Romans 8:18 Do you see how many darts the righteous quenched in those days? Seems it not to you to be fiery darts, when the patriarch burned with inward fire, as he was offering up his son? Yea, and other righteous men also have quenched all his darts. Whether then they be reasonings that assault us, let us hold out this; or whether they be base desires, let us use this; or whether again labors and distresses, upon this let us repose. Of all the other armor, this is the safeguard; if we have not this, they will be quickly pierced through. Withal, says he, taking up the shield of faith. What is the meaning of withal? It means both in truth, and in righteousness, and in the preparation of the gospel; that is to say, all these have need of the aid of faith.

And therefore he adds further, and take the helmet of salvation; that is to say, finally by this shall you be able to be in security. To receive the helmet of salvation is to escape the peril. For as the helmet covers the head perfectly in every part, and suffers it not to sustain any injury, but preserves it, so also does faith supply alike the place of a shield, and of a helmet to preserve us. For if we quench his darts, quickly shall we receive also those saving thoughts that suffer not our governing principle to sustain any harm; for if these, the thoughts that are adverse to our salvation, are quenched, those which are not so, but which contribute to our salvation, and inspire us with good hopes, will be generated within us, and will rest upon our governing principle, as a helmet does upon the head.

And not only this, but we shall take also the sword of the Spirit, and thus not only ward off his missiles, but smite the devil himself. For a soul that does not despair of herself, and is proof against those fiery darts, will stand with all intrepidity to face the enemy, and will cleave open his breastplate with this very sword with which Paul also burst through it, and brought into captivity his devices 2 Corinthians 10:5; he will cut off and behead the serpent.

Which is the word of God.

By the word of God in this place, he means on the one hand the ordinance of God, or the word of command; or on the other that it is in the Name of Christ. For if we keep his commandments, by these we shall kill and slay the dragon himself, the crooked serpent. Isaiah 27:1 And as he said, You shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the evil one; that he might not puff them up, he shows them, that above all things they stand in need of God; for what does he say?

With all prayer and supplication, he says, these things shall be done, and you shall accomplish all by praying. But when you draw near, never ask for yourself only: thus shall you have God favorable to you.

With all prayer and supplication, praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance for all the saints. Limit it not, I say, to certain times of the day, for hear what he is saying; approach at all times; pray, says he, without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Have you never heard of that widow, how by her importunity she prevailed? Luke 18:1-7 Have you never heard of that friend, who at midnight shamed his friend into yielding by his perseverance? Luke 11:5-8 Have you not heard of the Syrophœnician woman Mark 7:25-30, how by the constancy of her entreaty she called forth the Lord's compassion? These all of them gained their object by their importunity.

Praying at all seasons, says he, in the Spirit.

That is to say, let us seek for the things which are according to God, nothing of this world, nothing pertaining to this life.

Therefore, is there need not only that we pray without ceasing, but also, that we should do so watching -- and watching, says he, thereunto. Whether he is here speaking of vigils; or of the wakefulness of the soul, I admit both meanings. Do you see how that Canaanitish woman watched unto prayer? And though the Lord gave her no answer, nay, even shook her off, and called her a dog, she said, Yea, Lord: for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table Matthew 15:27, and desisted not until she obtained her request. How, too, did that widow cry, and persist so long, until she was able to shame into yielding that ruler, that neither feared God, nor regarded man Luke 18:1-7? And how, again, did the friend persist, remaining before the door in the dead of night, till he shamed the other into yielding by his importunity, and made him arise. Luke 11:5-8 This is to be watchful.

Would you understand what watchfulness in prayer is? Go to Hannah, hearken to her very words, Adonai Eloi Sabaoth. 1 Samuel 1:11 Nay, rather, hear what preceded those words; they all rose up, says the history, from the table 1 Samuel 1:9, and she, immediately, did not betake herself to sleep, nor to repose. Whence she appears to me even when she was sitting at the table to have partaken lightly, and not to have been made heavy with viands. Otherwise never could she have shed so many tears; for if we, when we are fasting and foodless, hardly pray thus, or rather never pray thus, much more would not she ever have prayed thus after a meal, unless even at the meal she had been as they that eat not. Let us be ashamed, us that are men, at the example of this woman; let us be ashamed, that are suing and gasping for a kingdom, at her, praying and weeping for a little child. And she stood, it says, before the Lord 1 Samuel 1:10; and what are her words? Adonai, Lord, Eloi Sabaoth! and this is, being interpreted, O Lord, the God of Hosts. Her tears went before her tongue; by these she hoped to prevail with God to bend to her request. Where tears are, there is always affliction also: where affliction is, there is great wisdom and heedfulness. If you will indeed, she continues, look on the affliction of your handmaid, and will give to your handmaid a man child, then will I give him unto the Lord all the days of his life. 1 Samuel 1:11 She said not, for one year, or, for two, as we do -- nor said she, if you will give me a child, I will give you money; but, I give back to You the very gift itself entire, my first-born, the son of my prayer. Truly here was a daughter of Abraham. He gave when it was demanded of him. She offers even before it is demanded.

But observe even after this her deep reverence. Only her lips moved, but her voice, it says, was not heard. 1 Samuel 1:13 And thus does he who would gain his request draw near unto God; not consulting his ease, nor gaping, nor lounging, nor scratching his head, nor with utter listlessness. What, was not God able to

grant, even without any prayer at all? What, did He not know the woman's desire even before she asked? And yet had He granted it before she asked, then the woman's earnestness would not have been shown, her virtue would not have been made manifest, she would not have gained so great a reward. So that the delay is not the result of envy or of witchcraft, but of providential kindness. When therefore ye hear the Scripture saying, that the Lord had shut up her womb (ver. 5, 6.), and that, her rival provoked her sore; consider that it is His intention to prove the woman's seriousness. For, mark, she had a husband devoted to her, for he said 1 Samuel 1:8, Am I not better to you than ten sons? And her rival, it says, provoked her sore, that is, reproached her, insulted over her. And yet did she never once retaliate, nor utter imprecation against her, nor say, Avenge me, for my rival reviles me. The other had children, but this woman had her husband's love to make amends. With this at least he even consoled her, saying, Am not I better to you than ten sons?

But let us look, again, at the deep wisdom of this woman. And Eli, it says, thought she had been drunken. 1 Samuel 1:13 Yet observe what she says to him also, Nay, count not your handmaid for a daughter of Belial, for out of the abundance of my complaint and my provocation have I spoken hitherto. 1 Samuel 1:16 Here is truly the proof of a contrite heart, when we are not angry with those that revile us, when we are not indignant against them, when we reply but in self-defense. Nothing renders the heart so wise as affliction; nothing is there so sweet as godly mourning. 2 Corinthians 7:10 Out of the abundance, says she, of my complaint and my provocation have I spoken hitherto. Her let us imitate, one and all. Harken, you that are barren, hearken, you that desire children, hearken, both husbands and wives; yes, for husbands, too, used oftentimes to contribute their part; for hear what the Scripture says, And Isaac intreated the Lord for Rebekah his wife, because she was barren. Genesis 25:21 For prayer is able to accomplish great things.

With all prayer and supplication, says he, for all the saints, and for me, placing himself last. What doest thou, O blessed Paul, in thus placing yourself last? Yea, says he, that utterance may be given unto me, in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. And where are you an ambassador? To mankind, says he. Oh! amazing lovingkindness of God! He sent from Heaven in His own Name ambassadors for peace, and lo, men took them, and bound them, and revered not so much as the law of nations, that an ambassador never suffers any hurt. But, however, I am an ambassador in bonds. The chain lies like a bridle upon me, restraining my boldness, but your prayer shall open my mouth in order that I may speak all things I was sent to speak.

But that you also may know my affairs, how I do, Tychicus, the beloved brother, and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things. If faithful, he will tell no falsehood, he will in everything speak the truth:-- whom I have sent unto you for this very purpose, that you might know our state, and that he may comfort your hearts. Amazing, transcendent affection! that it may not be in the power, he means, of them that would, to affright you. For it is probable that they were in tribulation; for the expression, may comfort your hearts, intimates as much; that is, may not suffer you to sink under it.

Ver. 23. Peace be to the brethren and love with faith from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

He invokes upon them, peace and love with faith. He says well: for he would not that they should have regard to love by itself, and mingle themselves with those of a different faith. Either he means this, or that above described, namely, that they should have faith also, so as to have a cheerful confidence of the good things to come. The peace which is towards God, and the love. And if there be peace, there will also be

love; if love, there will be peace also. With faith, because without faith, love amounts to nothing; or rather love could not exist at all without it.

Ver. 24. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in uncorruptness.

Why does he separate the two here, placing peace by itself, and grace by itself?

In uncorruptness, he concludes.

What is this, in uncorruptness? It either means, in purity; or else, for the sake of those things which are incorruptible, as, for example, not in riches, nor in glory, but in those treasures which are incorruptible. The in means, through. Through uncorruptness, that is, through virtue. Because all sin is corruption. And in the same way as we say a virgin is corrupted, so also do we speak of the soul. Hence Paul says, Lest by any means your minds should be corrupted. 2 Corinthians 11:3 And again elsewhere, he says, In doctrine, showing uncorruptness. For what, tell me, is corruption of the body? Is it not the dissolution of the whole frame, and of its union? This then is what takes place also in the soul when sin enters. The beauty of the soul is temperance, and righteousness; the health of the soul is courage, and prudence; for the base man is hideous in our eyes, so is the covetous, so is the man who gives himself up to evil practices, and so the coward and unmanly man is sick, and the foolish man is out of health. Now that sins work corruption, is evident from this, that they render men base, and weak, and cause them to be sick and diseased. Nay, and when we say that a virgin is corrupted, we say so, strictly speaking, on this account also, not only because the body is defiled, but because of the transgression. For the mere act is natural; and if in that consisted the corruption, then were marriage corruption. Hence is it not the act that is corruption, but the sin, for it dishonors and puts her to shame. And again, what would be corruption in the case of a house? Its dissolution. And so, universally, corruption is a change which takes place for the worse, a change into another state, to the utter extinction of the former one. For hear what the Scripture says, All flesh had corrupted his way Genesis 6:12; and again, In intolerable corruption Exodus 18:18; and again, Men corrupted in mind. 2 Timothy 3:8 Our body is corruptible, but our soul is incorruptible. Oh then, let us not make that corruptible also. This, the corruption of the body, was the work of former sin; but sin which is after the Laver, has the power also to render the soul corruptible, and to make it an easy prey to the worm that dies not. For never had that worm touched it, had it not found the soul corruptible. The worm touches not adamant, and even if he touches it, he can do it no harm. Oh then, corrupt not the soul; for that which is corrupted is full of foul stench; for hearken to the Prophet who says, My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. Psalm 38:5

However, this corruption of the body shall put on incorruption 1 Corinthians 15:53, but the other of the soul, never; for where incorruption is, there is no corruption. Thus is it a corruption which is incorruptible, which has no end, a deathless death; which would have been, had the body remained deathless. Now if we shall depart into the next world having not corruption, we have that corruption incorruptible and endless; for to be ever burning, and not burnt up, ever wasted by the worm, is corruption incorruptible; like as was the case with the blessed Job. He was corrupted, and died not, and that through a lengthened period, and wasted continually, scraping the clods of dust from his sore. Some such torment as this shall it undergo, when the worms surround and devour it, not for two years nor for three, nor for ten, nor for ten thousand, but for years without end; for their worm, says He, dies not.

Moral. Let us take the alarm then, I entreat you, let us dread the words, that we meet not with the realities. Covetousness is corruption, corruption more dangerous than any other, and leading on to idolatry. Let us

shun the corruption, let us choose the incorruption. Have you in covetousness overreached and defrauded some one? The fruits of your covetousness perish, but the covetousness remains; a corruption which is the foundation of incorruptible corruption. The enjoyment indeed passes away, but the sin remains imperishable. A fearful evil is it for us not to strip ourselves of everything in this present world; a great calamity to depart into the next with loads of sins about us. For in Sheol, it is said who shall give You thanks? Psalm 6:5 There is the place of judgment; then is there no longer season for repentance. How many things did the rich man bewail then? Luke 16:23 And yet it availed him nothing. How many things did they say who had neglected to feed Christ? Matthew 25:41 Yet were they led away notwithstanding into the everlasting fire. How many things had they then to say: that had wrought iniquity; Lord, did we not prophesy by Your Name, and by Your Name cast out devils? And yet notwithstanding, they were not owned. All these things therefore will take place then; but it will be of no avail, if they be not done now. Let us fear then, lest ever we should have to say then, Lord, when saw we You an hungered, and fed You not? Matthew 25:44 Let us feed Him now, not one day, nor two, nor three days. For let not mercy and truth, says the Wise Man, forsake you. Proverbs 3:3 He says not do it once, nor twice. The Virgins, we know, had oil, but not enough to last out. Matthew 25:3-8 And thus we need much oil, and thus should we be like a green olive tree in the house of God. Psalm 52:8 Let us reflect then how many burdens of sins each of us has about him, and let us make our acts of mercy counterbalance them; nay rather, far exceed them, that not only the sins may be quenched, but that the acts of righteousness may be also accounted unto us for righteousness. For if the good deeds be not so many in number as to put aside the crimes laid against us, and out of the remainder to be counted unto us for righteousness, then shall no one rescue us from that punishment, from which God grant that we may be all delivered, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father, etc.

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